

## Against the Grain

---

Manuscript 8478

---

## Booklover – Better Late Than Never Summer Reading

Donna Jacobs

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

---

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries.  
Please contact [epubs@purdue.edu](mailto:epubs@purdue.edu) for additional information.

## Reader's Roundup

from page 47

considered the next best thing. Such rapid changes have therefore created an unpredictable workplace, one in which an individual must responsibly learn and navigate. Thus, this makes career growth even more challenging and overwhelming, especially in the library profession where change spotlights itself. Change brings major responsibilities to the libraries, and library employees must embrace it if they want to ultimately succeed personally and professionally. The question then is, "How?" How does one become successful in an environment where uncertainty plays a major role? This question and more can be found in **Caitlin Williams' *Be Opportunity-Minded: Start Growing Your Career Now***.

**Williams**, a professional development consultant, has spent over 30 years working as a career success coach. She works with the **American Library Association** to enrich library professionals with career-enhancing tools and resources. She has also written several books and articles on the subject in addition to numerous speaking engagements. She knows that accomplishments begin with valuing oneself and spending a great amount of time evaluating skills, abilities, and talents. After acknowledging such assets, one can then begin to recognize just how many opportunities are out there for individuals with a growth mindset.

*Opportunity-Minded* shows how passionate and devoted **Williams** is to career development. Her writing illustrates how she wishes to

motivate people with inspiration and positivity. There is no doubt that she wants people to thrive in their careers and she does a great job of taking such a broad topic and narrowing it down into a clear, precise framework that highlights the essentials. The book has nine chapters covering topics such as workplace changes, self-assessments, and growth opportunities. She also includes two useful sections called "Notes to Myself" and "My Going for It! Growth Plan." These sections provide an opportunity where she asks herself reflective questions and provides the readers for space to jot down their own ideas as well.

Essentially, one can view this book as a self-reflecting journal. Chapter 4 is even titled "How Well Do You Know You?" which dives deep into the importance of knowing not only one's skills but also one's strengths and aspirations. In providing this chapter, **Williams** is encouraging the reader to better understand her or his career and where they would like to go next. Neither this book nor our profession is designed for the "quick fixes" to one's career. Since growth plans change, individuals need to be mindful that their career is a never-ending, learning process. After all, opportunities are everywhere. Now, the question is, "Are you ready for them?" After reading **Williams'** motivational words, I can say, "Yes, I am."

*Opportunity-Minded* is an invaluable book that nearly anyone who works in the library profession would find beneficial. It is filled with opportunity-minded tips and strategies which can jumpstart or rejuvenate a person's career if put into action.

**ATG Reviewer Rating: I need this book on my nightstand.** (This book is so good, that I want a copy close at hand when I am in bed.) 🐼

## Booklover — Better Late Than Never Summer Reading

Column Editor: **Donna Jacobs** (Retired, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC 29425) <donna.jacobs55@gmail.com>

The next choice for this **Booklover** is a more stereotypical summer read than the previous work by **Wole Soyinka** entitled *Civilian and Soldier*. A work of fiction, *Jenny*, a novel by **Sigrid Undset**, is described in the inside flap of the book cover as "an important and courageous work, but some found it to be 'immoral'." The description continues with more enticement: "The novel tells the story of Jenny Winge, a Norwegian painter, who goes to Rome to seek artistic inspiration but ultimately betrays her own ambitions and ideals." *Jenny* is included with other works, *Thjodolf*, *Simon-sen*, a sampling of **Undset's** personal letters, and an "Introduction" by **Tim Page**, a **Pulitzer Prize** winner on staff at the *Washington Post*, in *The Unknown Sigrid Undset*. The inside flap of the book cover alerts the reader that *Jenny* is a new translation (2001) by **Tiina Nunnally** and this translation "captures the fresh, vivid style of **Undset's** writing and restores passages omitted from the 1921 English version." A comfortable chair, a little time, and soon I'm in Rome with Jenny who is trying to navigate the world, an artistic career, relationships, romance, and all the entanglements that come with this journey.

**Sigrid Undset** won the 1928 **Nobel Prize in Literature** "principally for her powerful descriptions of Northern life during the Middle Ages," her work that is usually referenced with the award is *Kristin Lavransdatter*, a trilogy set in medieval Norway. (*Jenny* is not representative of this body of her work; rather this story comes from her early "realistic" period where she focused on women and love.)

**Tim Page's** "Introduction" to *The Unknown Sigrid Undset* is in itself a delightful read. Right from the first paragraph his perspective is: "Still, unless a present-day English-speaking reader happens to be of Scandinavian descent, the Catholic faith, or unusually interested in world literature, the name **Sigrid Undset** will likely draw a blank." (Sidebar personal bio: English-speaking, not Scandinavian, raised Catholic, interested in world literature — I guess I'm reading the right book.)

**Undset** was born in Kalundborg, Denmark in 1882. Her father, **Ingvald**, moved the family to Kristiania (Oslo) in 1884 where he accepted a post with the university museum. Her parents were keenly aware of her intellect and from an early age spent great effort in her intellectual cultivation. Discussions on history, politics, archaeology, and the Old Norse language were dynamic between father and daughter. This all came to an unfortunate end when her father succumbed to malaria when she was 11 years of age. The family struggled on a small state pension provided to widows. This struggle could be the reason behind **Page's** description of **Undset** as a "quiet, dutiful, highly serious, and somewhat remote young woman whose closest companions were her books." Not to be daunted by circumstance, she attended a commercial college and then took a secretarial position at **Wisbech Electrical Company** at the age of 16. She persevered for ten years at this job that she hated. During these ten years she must have been writing, for **Page** relates this interesting anecdote about her coworkers: "During one midmorning break she was heard chuckling

over something she was reading. 'It was a piece she had written herself,' according to her first biographer, **A.H. Winsnes**. 'She read it to the others. It was written with such 'warmth and humor,' say her colleagues, 'that we could not help interrupting — Good Heavens! Why don't you write instead of sitting in an office?'" I guess we know where this went...

*Jenny* begins with a young man, Helge, arriving in Rome. "At last, now at last there was one sight that was richer than all his dreams. And it was Rome. A wide plain of rooftops lay beneath him in the hollow of the valley, a jumble of roofs on buildings that were old and new, tall buildings and low buildings. They looked as if they had been put up quite haphazardly and as big as was needed at the time; only in a few places did the streets cut regular clefts through the mass of rooftops. And this whole world of disorderly lines that intersected each other at thousands of sharp angles lay rigid and motionless beneath the pale sky, in which an invisible sinking sun sporadically ignited a tiny rim of light on the edges of the clouds. The sun hung dreaming under a delicate, whitish mist, into which not a single spurting column of smoke blended, because there were no factory smokestacks in sight, and no smoke came from any of the comical little tin chimneys sticking up from the buildings. ... And above everything hovered the church domes, a countless number of them. The magnificent gray dome far off in the distance, on the other



continued on page 49

# Collecting to the Core — Classics of Sociology



by **Cindy L. Craig** (Associate University Librarian, University of Florida; Sociology Subject Editor, *Resources for College Libraries*, 2012-2019) <clcraig@ufl.edu>

Column Editor: **Anne Doherty** (*Resources for College Libraries* Project Editor, CHOICE/ACRL) <adoherty@ala-choice.org>

**Column Editor's Note:** The "Collecting to the Core" column highlights monographic works that are essential to the academic library within a particular discipline, inspired by the *Resources for College Libraries* bibliography (online at <http://www.rclweb.net>). In each essay, subject specialists introduce and explain the classic titles and topics that continue to remain relevant to the undergraduate curriculum and library collection. Disciplinary trends may shift, but some classics never go out of style. — AD

In 1997, the **International Sociological Association (ISA)** asked its members to list the five books published in the twentieth century that were most influential to their work as sociologists in order to critically assess the "sociological heritage" of the century. The top ten includes works that are foundational not only to the field of sociology, but also to economics, political science, social psychology, and religion.<sup>1</sup> This essay will examine a selection of these titles, some of which are still assigned as required reading in many introductory college courses and endure as classics in the RCL core bibliography.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, two works by **Max Weber** appear in the top ten. One of the leading intellectuals of his time, **Weber** (along with **Karl Marx** and **Émile Durkheim**) laid the foundation of modern sociology. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, originally intended to be part of an edited multivolume encyclopedia, was published posthumously by **Weber's** wife in 1921, although the first complete English translation was not available until 1968.<sup>2</sup> Still,

*Economy and Society* was voted the most influential **ISA** title of the twentieth century. In this magnum opus, **Weber** synthesized his lifelong empirical research on the comparative histories of the world's great civilizations. Out of this analysis, he developed an organized system of sociology. *Economy and Society* is perhaps most famous for its detailed description of the modern bureaucracy. In contrast to the old religious systems that dominated society through charismatic means, he argued that modern society has become dominated by political power wielded through bureaucracies. Bureaucracies are based on the application of reason and impersonal laws wielded by professional experts. Participants obey a hierarchy of rules rather than a hierarchy of people. Because this system of authority is rational, efficient, and stable, participants believe in its legitimacy. Bureaucracies are controlled by a small group of self-appointed leaders. Thus, the quality of life of all members of a society is in the hands of oligarchs.<sup>3</sup>

**Weber's** *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* ranked fourth in the ten most influential books and remains one of the most renowned, and controversial, works in sociology.<sup>4</sup> Originally published in German between 1904 and 1905, the work was first translated into English in 1930 by American sociologist **Talcott Parsons**. In it, **Weber** examines the historically peculiar form of capitalism that emerged after the Reformation. Protestants, specifically Calvinists, continually accumulated wealth for its own sake, rather than for any pleasure the profits would bring. They saw it as a moral calling to make money while maintaining a disinterest in worldly luxuries. **Weber** believed this behavior was motivated by the

Calvinist belief in predestination, in which one can never be sure who is destined for heaven. Success in their calling was taken as a sign of being one of the few chosen for salvation. The notion of a calling, which did not exist in ancient societies or religions, projects religious behavior into the everyday world. **Weber** observed that the impact of the Protestant ethic was strongest in the United States, where it drove the development of industrial centers in the East.<sup>5</sup> Although economic competition, rather than religious values, drives capitalism today, the remnants of this work ethic persist in Americans' long work hours, scant vacation days, and resistance to taking sick leave.

Coming in second on the **ISA** list, behind *Economy and Society*, **C. Wright Mills's** *The Sociological Imagination* carries continued relevance to scholars and students alike.<sup>6</sup> Described by critic **Donald Macrae** as "an elegant — indeed, sometimes, apocalyptic — writer," **Mills**, a sociology professor at **Columbia University**, attacked his peers' preoccupation with "grand theory" and "abstracted empiricism" and argued instead for more concern with social policy and opposition to major concentrations of power.<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, this book was not well-received at the time of its initial publication in 1959. **Mills** described the problem of individuals in mass society being "gripped by personal troubles" without understanding how these problems interact with social issues. It is the true job of the social scientist, then, to help individuals develop the ability to understand the relationship between one's experience and wider society. As defined by **Mills**, the sociological imagination can be applied to any seemingly mundane behavior. For example,

*continued on page 50*

## Booklover from page 48

side of the place where Helge caught a glimpse of the flowing river, that was the Basilica of St. Peter." This poetic, rambling, travelogue description continues until Helge meets two young women, one of whom is Jenny. With the beauty only a wordsmith of Nobel caliber can ink, **Undset** leads the reader through a complex investigation of young romance combined with youthful career dreams and a touch of wanderlust. "That's the wonderful thing about going abroad — all influences of the people you happen to live with back home are suspended. You have to see things with your own eyes and think for yourself. And you realize that whatever you get out of the trip will depend entirely on you: what you're capable of seeing and comprehending, and how you behave, and

who you choose to have an effect on you. And you learn to understand that what you get out of life depends solely on yourself. Yes, a little on circumstances, of course, as you said before. But you find out how, in accordance with your own nature, you can most easily overcome or get around obstacles — both during your travels and in general. You discover that the worst difficulties you encounter are usually things you've brought on yourself."

With that I will let you discover where **Undset** takes *Jenny* — it's a page-turner.

Epilogue. Included at the end of *The Unknown Sigrid Undset* is a sampling of personal correspondence between **Sigrid Undset** and **Andrea Dea Hedberg**. (The translator's note tells the story of this 40-year-old pen-pal relationship.) It began about the time **Undset** took the secretary job. She joined a Swedish pen-pal club and within a few months received

her first letter from **Dea**. **Dea** was the same age, the daughter of a bookseller and an avid reader. In their letters they share their dreams of writing — **Dea** would pursue journalism. Their relationship was forged on paper as they only met in person a few times.

I'll leave you with one small excerpt: "April 3, 1900. Dear **Dea!**" **Undset** begins this letter apologetic for not writing sooner; describes how the "very thought of the office makes me sick"; her "artist temperament" — "There's nothing I have greater contempt for than artists...." and how she struggles with her dreams to write — "Sometimes I want so much to write a book. The way I envision it in my mind, both the plot and the characters are good, but I'm afraid I'll never have the skill to portray any of them — let alone be capable of writing it all down." Twenty-eight years later, she had won the Nobel. 📖